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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 004809

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, INR/EAP, EAP/PD  
NSC FOR H. MORROW

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [KPAO](#) [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: MORE PHILIPPINE REACTION TO UNFOLDING U.S.  
ESPIONAGE CASE

REF: A. EAP/MTS-MANILA UNCLASS EMAIL 07 OCT 2005

- [1](#)B. MANILA 4785
- [1](#)C. MANILA 4466
- [1](#)D. MANILA 4433

Classified By: Political Officer John R. Groch for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The indictment of Philippine national Michael Ray Aquino on charges of conspiracy and acting as an unregistered foreign agent has elicited a range of reactions in the Philippines, including comments from President Arroyo and the Secretary of Justice. Key Opposition politicians, however, have largely refrained from commenting in recent days. Much of the reaction has centered on Aquino's alleged connections to Opposition politicians, including former president Joseph "Erap" Estrada and Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson; Aquino is routinely being described in the local media as Lacson's "protege." Unsurprisingly, Malacanang has sought to make political hay out of the indictment by attacking the Opposition and its apparent links to Aquino. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) In the latest Philippine reaction to the unfolding U.S. espionage case (refs B-D), President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has responded to Aquino's October 6 indictment by publicly linking the espionage allegations to her oft-repeated claims that the Opposition has been trying to destabilize her government. Arroyo has characterized the Opposition politicians who allegedly received classified information from Aquino as "coup plotters" and "robbers," and suggested that they were "prepared to go to the extent of destroying Philippine-American relations just to serve their ambitions for power." The President, through her Press Secretary, has also called on Opposition politicians who

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allegedly received stolen U.S. documents to apologize to the Philippine people for disgracing "the good name of our country."

[1](#)3. (U) Of late, there has been almost no response to the Aquino indictment from Opposition politicians, including those, like Estrada and Lacson, who had previously come forward and acknowledged that they had links to him. This lack of response has itself been cause for comment in the local media. However, Senator Aquilino Pimentel, an Opposition leader who has acknowledged seeing some of the material allegedly procured by Aquino, has continued to downplay the importance of the U.S. case.

[1](#)4. (U) The GRP is following up on the U.S. indictment of Aquino, and the purported role of Opposition politicians in his case, by launching its own investigation, geared to ferreting out an alleged "money trail" linking the Opposition, Aquino, and Leandro Aragoncillo, the FBI analyst arrested last month. Secretary of Justice Raul Gonzalez has expressed disappointment with U.S. law enforcement agencies over this matter, asserting that, "They (the USG) meddle with us and then they don't cooperate with us." Several Philippine congressmen have also called for the USG to reveal the names of any Philippine officials alleged to be involved with the case, and Senator Miriam Santiago has filed a Senate resolution seeking an investigation into the case. Late on October 11, the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) Interpol Chief asserted that new information coming from Washington indicated that some of the information allegedly stolen by Aquino and Aragoncillo ended up in the hands of the Communist New People's Army. He did not provide evidence to support this claim. He also stated that the USG would be making an unspecified announcement in the case on October 11 (Washington time).

[1](#)5. (C) Comment. It is not at all surprising that this is being treated locally largely as another episode in the Philippines' ongoing internal political melodrama. President Arroyo has seized upon the case as an opportunity to bolster her own political stature and to strike back at the Opposition. The relative silence of Opposition politicians is a good indication that this case may in fact provide Arroyo with a useful weapon to hit them over the head with.

The comments of Sec. Gonzalez are unfortunate, especially since Philippine DOJ Undersecretary Ernesto Pineda and NBI Director Reynaldo Wycoco had constructive meetings last week with USG counterparts on this matter in Washington (ref A). Gonzalez does, however, have a reputation for ritually speaking off the cuff, and his remarks should be taken in that context. End Comment.

JONES